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621 The natives cannot imagine any tract of land or territory being totally
421 unconnected with a human group. Most tracts of uninhabited bush are 'owned' by chi[illegible] who have ritual jurisdiction over hunting rights. But some tracts o[illegible]ed and uninhabited land (e.g. between Biuŋ and the river) appea[illegible] have no 'owners', either secular or ritual. The natives say the 'owners' have died out. The land did at one time have a connexion, perhaps only a ritual connexion, with a human group, and this connexion remains mystically effective still. Such areas of *wasak*, as the natives call them, are economically a free good. Anyone can come and build or cultivate there. But a man who does so will try to find some person or some clan to offer sacrifice to the Earth on his behalf, as the residuary legatee of the defunct 'owners', through local or clanship ties with them. If he fails to find anyone, he will consult a diviner to find out for himself where the sacred spots are in this stretch of *wasak* and make the sacrifices himself, thus creating a moral bond with it. Nowhere is the Earth inert; and its mystical powers are a reflex of its relations with human groups.

The three functionally differentiated aspects of man's relations to territory in Taleland are interconnected in Tale thought and custom in a rather complex way, and local differences blur the general principles. The simplest approach will be from the starting-point of land used for agricultural purposes. This is by far the most important economic use of land, but not the only one. There are few products of nature on the earth's surface that the natives do not make some economic use of, or rely on for other practical purposes. It is easy to see, therefore, why the natural environment is built into the social organization and invested with values and meaning in the social philosophy and ritual beliefs of the Tallensi. Our analysis would lead to the same conclusions if we started from uncultivated bush (*moog*), for instance, the source of essential products such as firewood, wild fruits, shea nuts, thatching grass, reeds for matmaking, rafters, medicine roots, and so forth, as well as of game and wild fowl.

Farm-land and Subsistence

311 Land means many things to the Tale farmer. He distinguishes, firstly, between the soil (*tam*) and the arable, or tilled land (*kuob*). He recognizes and takes into account different kinds and qualities of soil. This is something independent of the tillage of the land; and, conversely, cultivation (*kuo*, from *kɔ*, to hoe) turns any kind of soil (*tam*) into arable (*kuob*). Tilled land, again, is classified, without reference to soil qualities, by its location and by the kind of crops grown on it. Thus, every farmer has one or more home farms (*saman*) in the settlement and one or more bush farms (*poog*) in an area free of human habitations. In addition, a particular farm is merely a parcel of land, a bit carved out of a *tɛŋ*. In this context a *tɛŋ* is a stretch of territory in its useful, material aspect. One can speak of such and such a *tɛŋ* as being very fertile, or as having a sandy soil (*tambiihug*).

241 Farming is the basis of the Talɔŋ's livelihood. A failure of crops,
731 nowadays, spells widespread privation. Thirty years ago it would have brought famine. Tallensi often talk of this, especially when unpropitious

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weather causes anxiety about the crops; for famine is the greatest social calamity they can imagine and is a very real menace. I have heard people speak of the last great famine that swept the country, some forty years ago, with a poignancy that made one realize how deeply dread of famine is stamped into the native's outlook on life. 'It is our black man's thing this (*ti gbansablɔg yɛl n-a-de*)', they say, 'from the days of our fathers and forefathers'—or, as we might put it, it is a law of nature for the black man. 'The white man has saved us. If there is hunger now we can buy grain from Mampurugu or Kusaa.' Sombrely they describe how in times of famine people ate grass and weeds fit only for animals, and died on the footpaths. Men deserted wife and child to seek sustenance among distant relatives who had a little food. They took their own children to sell into slavery among the Mamprusi for food. The social order broke down completely.

Sufficient crops of the staple cereals mean survival, good crops mean joy to the Tallensi. They show it in the Harvest Festival that marks the end of the farming year. If the harvest is poor, they say, people attend the dances perfunctorily and dance without enthusiasm. But in a good year, as I saw in 1936, no one can be held back from the dances. Young mothers steal out to them with their babes in their arms, sedate elders fling themselves into the rout with the zest and energy of striplings. There is a general feeling of elation. 'Our bodies are full of strength (*ti nɛŋ kpɛŋŋa*)', is how the natives describe it.

A successful farming year not only provides for the satisfaction of the fundamental physical needs of existence; it gives security to the social order. There is ample evidence of this in the busy and cheerful atmosphere of the market-places, and, more significantly, in the spate of ceremonial activities that follows on a satisfactory harvest; for all Tale ceremonial activities express and fortify relationships of amity and interdependence. For the individual the physical well-being of himself and his dependants—sufficiency of food, good health, and the increase of offspring—is a sign that all is well with the social order. The ritual symbols in which the forces that shape Tale social organization and keep it on a steady course are objectified and made emotionally tangible go back to this fact of native experience. The stereotyped formula with which a prayer offered at any shrine is usually concluded epitomizes this: 'Grant that fields be farmed (fruitfully), that live-stock breed, that offspring be born, that (undisturbed) sleep be slept (*Kye ka kuo kɔ, ka guul guul, ka dɔŋam dɔŋa, ka guom gbis*).'

Productive Efficiency and the Bounds set by Nature

Now what does the achievement of sufficiency of food and general physical well-being depend upon? It is quite clear, from the way the natives carry on their agricultural activities and the way they think and talk about them that, other things being equal, they consider skill and industry to be the main factors of efficiency. But variations in efficiency between a *pukpaa*, a slothful farmer, and a proper *kpa'at*, an industrious hoe-man, mean only a difference in their respective standards of consumption. One has rather less food and other goods than the other.

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731 241 Whether there is food or famine, a bare sufficiency or a surplus for the majority of people, depends on other things than human efficiency. It depends enormously on the weather. Drought (*waar*) in the early months of the rainy season brings hunger; an erratic distribution of rainfall causes a poor harvest; an unusually violent tornado (*sanziug*), crushing and uprooting the young millet, produces a shortage. Locusts (*tinta'aba*) descending suddenly, inexplicably, on the half-grown crops and devouring them, ruin the most efficient farmer's work. These are public calamities beyond human control, and they are an ever-present danger. During my first tour in Taleland a long gap in the normal sequence of the early rains threw everybody into a state of foreboding. Men went about restlessly, waiting anxiously for a sign of rain. During my second tour locusts destroyed the crops in one part of the country. The grief and chagrin of those whose crops had suffered showed that they felt they had suffered an irreparable loss.

164 165 Another possible natural disaster which would destroy physical well-being and rend the social fabric is an epidemic of small-pox (*zinzaaŋ*) or of measles (*kasoo*).[1] Cases of *kasoo* occur every year and the mortality is high. I have heard of more than one family in which several children died of it in a week or two. Naturally the natives, who have no remedy for it, regard it with terror. The last small-pox epidemic (before 1937) occurred about a generation ago. The natives know that the white man's precautions will check any future epidemic, but they still dread the danger. For small-pox, when it comes, devastates social life. People stop visiting [766 their kinsfolk and neighbours; stricken families are isolated by a wall of 758] thorn bushes; those who die of small-pox are not even given proper burial but are interred in the midden heap or thrown into the uncultivated bush. At such times small-pox must be referred to by a euphemism. It is 'the chief' (*na'ab*), and a death due to it is 'the chief has bestowed a boon (*na'ab maalya*)'.

731 These are the ever-possible public calamities which defeat human effort and skill. Private dangers also threaten the individual farmer. A snake might bite him as he stoops to hoe; blight might destroy his millet but leave his neighbour's farms unaffected; sickness might lay him low or deprive him of the help of wife or son.

788 771 782 It must not be thought that the Tale farmer goes about in a permanent state of fear of these external dangers to his welfare and security. When things are going well he does not give a thought to them. Living, as they do, at a subsistence level that gives them no regular surplus over what they require to satisfy their normal wants, the Tallensi take no long-term precautions, either individually or collectively, against the dangers of starvation or pestilence. They have neither the technical means nor the social institutions for such measures. But these threats do materialize often enough for them to serve as the realities towards which Tale acts of ritual self-protection, both individual and collective, are directed. Tallensi do not believe that these ritual acts will prevent natural disasters

[1] From the natives' description of the symptoms, I think the sickness they call *kasoo* is probably measles, but I am not certain and I have not been able to obtain medical corroboration.

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or personal mishaps. They do not attempt to control nature by means of ritual, though the content of their prayers might persuade the superficial observer that this is their object. Their ritual is concerned with the effects of natural phenomena and physiological happenings on the fate of the individual and the coherence of the community. Ritual is the means of fortifying the individual and the society against these effects. Tallensi believe that the fate of individuals and of communities depends on their relationships with mystical powers. Natural phenomena are the medium, as it were, by means of which these powers intervene in human affairs. If men offend them, they will intervene disastrously; if men please them, they will intervene beneficently. And men offend or please the mystical powers by the manner in which they behave to one another and by the way in which they observe the moral norms of the society and the ritual duties that symbolize these norms. Ritual—that is, sacrifice and prayer—is a means of keeping up a good relationship with the mystical powers. These, as we know, are principally the ancestors and the Earth.

Striving after Security: the Ritual Background

We have tried to state briefly how the Tallensi connect their ritual conceptions with their striving after personal prosperity and social security. This can be put in another way. The individual farmer, working his own land with the aid of his dependants for their common subsistence, looks to his and their immediate ancestors for spiritual protection. He and his dependants are personally responsible for the success of their efforts in the working of their fields. They are also personally responsible for the goodwill of their immediate ancestors. The sacrifices and prayers they offer to their ancestors at sowing and harvest express these private concerns. They enable them to enjoy the fruits of their labour with a clear conscience and to overcome the demoralizing effect of accidents, which they regard as private misfortunes.

On the other hand, public calamities are associated with the mystical powers of the Earth, which are a symbolical projection of the common concerns of mankind. By prayers and sacrifices the ritual officers who represent the community in relation to the Earth and the Earth in relation to the community, the tendaanas, preserve the benevolence of the Earth towards mankind. Even though ritual measures often and obviously fail to prevent a public calamity, they serve to reintegrate the community after the calamity has passed. The idea of the Earth's being concerned with the common good corresponds to the fact that the cultivations of individuals are but parcels of land cut from the limitless earth.

Just as the earth's surface is limitless, so the mystical power of the Earth is universal.[1] All men everywhere acknowledge this in the ritual observances by which they show their respect for the Earth. The most important of these observances are the rules concerning 'things found on

[1] The word *tɛŋ* belongs to the *ka—si* Noun Class and takes the third person singular pronoun *ka*. This is the pronoun always used to refer to the earth in its material aspect. But in its mystical aspect the Earth is commonly referred to by the third person singular pronoun *a* which is primarily used for persons. To conform with this rule, we write 'earth' in the first sense with a lower-case initial letter, and 'Earth' with a capital letter for the latter.